

## Radiology Department

# Discogram (Discography)

### Introduction

You have been advised by your hospital consultant to have a discogram and you have been referred to Radiology department to have this procedure. The consultant who referred you should have discussed the reasons for this procedure with you and you should make sure that you understand these before attending for the procedure.

This is not intended to replace the discussion between you and your consultant but may act as a starting point for discussion.

If after reading this information you still have concerns or require further explanation, please contact the Radiology team on the telephone number **02476 967115**.

**Please contact the X-ray Department if your weight is equal to or more than 205Kg (32 stone) – You may require an alternative examination.**

### Referral and Consent

If you are having the discogram as a planned procedure, then you should have plenty of time to discuss the situation with your hospital consultant or a member of his/ her team.

It is possible that you need this procedure done as an emergency, in which case there may be less time for discussion, but none the less **you should have had sufficient explanation before you sign the consent form**. If after discussion with your hospital doctor or radiologist you do not want the procedure carried out, then you can decide against it.



## Patient Information

If the radiologist feels that your condition has changed or that your symptoms do not indicate such a procedure is necessary then he/she will explain this to you, communicate with the referring clinician and ask that you return to your referring clinician or ward for review. At all times the radiologist and referring clinician will be acting in your best interests.

### Points to Remember

- Please bring any sprays or inhalers that you are taking with you to your appointment.
- If you are taking Aspirin or Warfarin please call the telephone number on your appointment letter as soon as possible and ask that the radiologist (x-ray doctor) who will be performing your examination is notified. He/she will need to discuss this with your hospital consultant before your appointment can be confirmed.
- If you are on any other medication from your doctor, please continue to take it as normal.
- We also ask you to leave any valuable possessions at home.
- You will be admitted to a ward or the radiology day case unit before the examination and you will return to the ward or day case unit for up to 4 hours for post procedure care. It is not expected for you to stay overnight.

### What is a Discogram?

- A discogram is a special X-ray examination used to identify and determine if a particular injured vertebral disc is the source of your back pain. The procedure may be performed on more than one vertebral disc. A discogram is not a treatment or cure for your back pain; however, the test may help your doctor determine the most suitable form of treatment or pain relief for you.
- The examination will be performed by a radiologist (a specialised x-ray doctor) who may be assisted by a radiographer and a radiology nurse.
- The procedure itself may take up to 1 hour.

### Preparation

- You will have had some special blood tests to check your blood clotting ability.

## Patient Information

- Please do not eat or drink anything for 4 hours prior to your appointment.
- **You will need someone to drive you home after the examination. You should not drive for 24 hours after the examination.**
- If you have a high fever and are feeling unwell such as having the flu, the procedure may need to be postponed. However, if you have a common cold this will not affect the procedure.
- You will receive a letter giving details of the ward to which you will be admitted prior to this examination.

## What will happen when I arrive?

- Please go to the ward as instructed in your appointment letter.
- You will be asked to change into a hospital gown
- You will need a cannula inserted into a vein in your arm to allow access for fluids and for administering medication such as antibiotics prophylaxis.
- The Porters will collect you and take you to the x-ray department, on your bed, in time for your procedure

## During your examination

- You will be taken into the X-ray room where the examination will be explained to you by the consultant radiologist, and you may ask any questions that you have.
- You will be asked to sign a consent form before the procedure can begin.

## Discogram

- You will be asked to lay down on your left side or on your front on the X-ray table.
- Under fluoroscopy control, the radiologist will locate the vertebral disc/s to be examined. The radiologist may mark the area to be investigated on your back with a marker pen
- This is a sterile procedure, and the radiologist will wear sterile gloves. Your skin will be cleaned with cold antiseptic liquid and sterile towels will be placed over you.

## Patient Information

- Local anaesthetic will be injected into the skin to numb the area before the spinal needle is inserted into the middle of the disc. You may feel some discomfort at this point, but it will pass quickly.
- Contrast medium (a colourless fluid that shows on x-ray images) will be injected through the spinal needle into the disc. Injecting the fluid into the disc will increase the pressure within the disc.
- If the disc is injured, the increase of pressure following the injection of the contrast medium will reproduce your back pain
- If your pain is reproduced, you will be asked to estimate its intensity on a scale of 0 – 10.

## Risks of the procedure

- It is possible that you may have an allergic reaction from the contrast agent used. You will be asked about allergies by the radiologist or radiographer at the time.
- There is a very small risk of an infection being introduced during this procedure.
- There is a small risk of bleeding from having a needle inserted into your spine.
- Your back pain may be reproduced, and this may take a day or two to settle down again
- X-rays are a type of radiation. We are all exposed to natural background radiation every day of our lives; this comes from the sun, food we eat, and the ground. Exposure to X-rays carries a small risk, but your doctor feels that this risk is outweighed by the benefits of having the test. We will take all safeguards to minimise the number of X-rays you receive.

## Safety

The contrast agent contains iodine and is excreted by the kidneys in your urine. Please inform the radiologist:

- If you are allergic to iodine, have any other allergies or suffer from asthma.
- If you have reacted previously to the injection used for kidney X-rays and CT scanning.
- If you are on renal dialysis or have any problems with your kidneys.

## Patient Information

**Patients aged 12 – 55 years- could you be pregnant?** The risks of radiation are slightly higher for the unborn child so you will be asked to confirm that you are not pregnant before the examination can proceed.

### After your examination

- You will be taken back to the ward where you will sit up in bed for 3 – 4 hours bed rest
- Do not drive for 24 hours after the procedure
- You should rest for the next day or two as the test may trigger off your usual back pain
- If you have any problems after the examination, please see your GP.

### How do I get the results?

The results will not be given to you immediately. They will be sent to the hospital consultant who referred you to us for this examination.

### Other Sources of Information

For information about the effects of X-rays read the NRPB publication: “X-rays how safe are they?” on the Health Protection Agency website: [www.hpa.org.uk](http://www.hpa.org.uk)

Please note that the views expressed in these websites do not necessarily reflect the views of UHCW NHS Trust or the NHS.

The Trust has access to interpreting and translation services. If you need this information in another language or format, please contact the telephone number on your appointment letter and we will do our best to meet your needs.

The Trust operates a smoke free policy.

To give feedback on this leaflet please email [feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk](mailto:feedback@uhcw.nhs.uk)

#### Document History

Department:	Interventional
Contact:	27161
Updated:	May 2022
Review:	May 2024
Version:	6.1
Reference:	HIC/LFT/825/09